



## FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

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*For Immediate Release*

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# Park Authority Sets Fire in 20-Acre Meadow

Residents of the Sully District may have seen smoke in the air last week, but the fire that burned below was well planned and executed with precision. A 'prescribed burn' took place on February 8, 2006 in Sully Woodlands at a 20-acre meadow located on the west side of Pleasant Valley Road in Centreville. The low burning blaze, set by Fairfax County Park Authority staff and secured by the Fairfax County Fire Department, (Station 17 in Centreville and Station 16 in Clifton) was intended to reduce invasive plant species, remove heavy duff or old plant materials that inhibit new plant growth and pose a wildfire risk, and promote healthy native meadow which supports sensitive plant and animal species.

"This is all part of the ongoing resource management program aimed at preserving and enhancing healthy meadow complexes on parkland," said staff resource protection naturalist Charles Smith. "This prescribed burn is consistent with our resource management plans, the location is unique in that it is large, remote and rural in nature and the meadow is well-suited for a controlled burn program."

It may be hard to believe but fire is beneficial to the ecosystem. Most ecosystems in our region are fire adapted. They evolved with fire as part of the lifecycle of the plants that are the backbone of the ecosystem. Burning promotes plant health and seed germination.

Animals are not injured in the burn as large animals and birds leave the area before the burn begins because of the presence of humans and equipment. Cold-blooded animals like turtles and snakes are sleeping below ground and remain undisturbed and small mammals such as voles and mice stay low and keep moving, generally staying out of harm's way.

Controlled burns are carefully planned and coordinated with the Commonwealth's Department of Forestry and local fire departments. Permits must be obtained by the Park Authority from the County Health Department as well as the Fire Marshal's Office. Neighbors are also notified and the burn is only held if the weather and winds are conducive to a safe, controlled burn. Most burns take place in the winter when fuels such as grasses and small woody plants are dry.

The meadow will appear black and gray for a short time. As spring approaches, rain will help the fields green-up with new plant growth. The goal of a more diverse meadow system of native grasses and wildflowers will be apparent this summer. For more information contact Naturalist Charles Smith at 703-324-8555 or visit us online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources/resources-nrp.htm>.

*Media Note: Photos of the prescribed burn are available online at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/press/photos](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/press/photos).*

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